



Department of Justice

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Former State Department Employee Sentenced for Illegally Accessing Confidential Passport Files

A former State Department employee was sentenced today to one year of probation and ordered to pay a \$5,000 fine for illegally accessing more than 50 confidential passport application files.

On Jan. 27, 2009, Gerald R. Lueders, 65, of Woodbridge, Va., pleaded guilty to a one-count criminal information charging him with unauthorized computer access. Lueders was sentenced today by U.S. Magistrate Judge Alan Kay in the District of Columbia.

According to court documents, from June 1974 through September 2001, Lueders served as a Foreign Service Officer at the State Department. From October 2001 through February 2009, Lueders worked for the State Department as a retired annuitant, serving as a recruitment coordinator in various State Department bureaus. In the interim, from July 2005 to February 2008, Lueders also worked as a watch officer within the Office of Consular Affairs. According to information contained in plea documents, Lueders admitted he had access to official State Department computer databases in the regular course of his employment, including the Passport Information Electronic Records System (PIERS), which contains, among other data, all imaged passport applications dating back to 1994. The imaged passport applications on PIERS contain, among other things, a photograph of the passport applicant as well as certain personal information including the applicant's full name, date and place of birth, current address, telephone numbers, parent information, spouse's name and emergency contact information. These confidential files are protected by the Privacy Act of 1974, and access by State Department employees is strictly limited to official government duties.

In pleading guilty, Lueders admitted that between July 2005 and February 2008, he logged onto the PIERS database and viewed the passport applications of more than 50 celebrities, actors, politicians, musicians, athletes, family members, members of the media, business professionals, colleagues and other individuals identified in the press. Lueders admitted that he had no official government reason to access and view these passport applications, but that his sole purpose in accessing and viewing these passport applications was idle curiosity.

Lueders is the third current or former State Department employee to plead guilty in this continuing investigation. On Sept. 22, 2008, Lawrence C. Yontz, a former Foreign Service Officer and intelligence analyst, pleaded guilty to unlawfully accessing nearly 200 confidential passport files. Yontz was sentenced on Dec. 19, 2008, to 12 months of probation and ordered to perform 50 hours of community service. On Jan. 14, 2009, Dwayne F. Cross, a former administrative assistant and contract specialist, pleaded guilty to unlawfully accessing more than 150 confidential passport files. On March 23, 2009, Cross was sentenced to 12 months of probation and ordered to perform 100 hours of community service.

These cases are being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Armando O. Bonilla of the Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section, headed by Section Chief William M. Welch II. The cases are being investigated by the State Department Office of Inspector General.

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